

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 436
By Crowe

A RESOLUTION to recognize the James H. Quillen Veterans Affairs Medical Center on its centennial anniversary.

WHEREAS, it is fitting that the members of this General Assembly should pause to honor those exemplary institutions, celebrating milestones in their venerable existence, that have dedicated themselves to improving the quality of life for their fellow citizens who have risked life and limb to protect the freedoms that this nation holds so dear; and

WHEREAS, one such institution of health care excellence is the James H. Quillen Veterans Affairs Medical Center, a full-service hospital comprised of 111 beds, a nursing home with 120 beds, and a domiciliary with 348 beds; and

WHEREAS, the James H. Quillen VA Medical Center has had an interesting history over its past century of existence and is part of the great legacy of President Abraham Lincoln; and

WHEREAS, in 1865, President Lincoln proposed that the United States of America "provide for he who has borne the battle and his widow and his children"; his legislative agenda

included a National Soldiers Home, complete with several branches spread across the United States, of which the James H. Quillen Veterans Affairs Medical Center is an integral part; and

WHEREAS, the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers was duly established in 1865. After eight original branches of the "Home" were built and a supervising Board of Governors was established, it was then determined that the individual states could finance their own Soldier's Homes, but there would not be any federal funding in the future for such purpose; and

WHEREAS, the then-First District Congressman of East Tennessee, Walter P. Brownlow, had already secured federal funding for the building of bridges and roads in the area as well as the National Fish Hatchery in Erwin and the Andrew Johnson National Cemetery; and

WHEREAS, Congressman Brownlow's prior success fueled his desire to establish a Branch of the National Soldier's Home in his congressional district. The Board of Governors refused to give him audience, reminding him of the national policy, thereby stating that there would be no new branches built with federal funding; and

WHEREAS, the great orator requested five minutes of their time, and made his point in only three, by reminding the Board of three things: "(1) East Tennessee furnished the North 30,000 volunteers, more than any other State in the South. There were currently 18,250 Union pensioners living in the First Congressional District; (2) The Board had already built a Branch in Hampton, Virginia, a state where there were no Union volunteer soldiers of record; and (3) the Congress had recently approved the construction of a million dollar federal prison in Atlanta. Weren't our Volunteer Union soldiers deserving of as much as convicts?" The Board took an immediate vote and recommended to Congress that a branch be built in Tennessee's First Congressional District; and

WHEREAS, along with the help of the JC Board of Trade and the Grand Army of the Republic, Congressman Brownlow secured 7,000 signed petitions for the construction of the Home and be subsequently passed the bill unanimously through Congress; and

WHEREAS, in the three years that it took to build the facility, with an estimated construction cost of over \$2.1 million, Johnson City's property value and population doubled; 475 acres of farmland were purchased from four families at a price of \$50 per acre. Over 1,000 workers were employed for the three-year period, and a total of \$3 million in construction costs were spent for the project during that time; and

WHEREAS, the facility was finally occupied in 1903; it was estimated that visitors to the branch alone spent \$30,000 annually in the village, while soldiers spent \$40,000 in pensions; and

WHEREAS, the original Home construction included 37 buildings, which included eight barracks for housing 2,500 men, a mess hall (the Clock Tower), a four-ward infirmary, Officers/Surgeons quarters (homes), an Administrative building, powerhouse, laundry, chapel, theatre, bandstand (Gazebo), jail, and morgue; and

WHEREAS, from the urging of Congressman Brownlow, the renowned Andrew Carnegie donated \$25,000, which covered the complete construction costs for a library, and the major publishers of the day donated 16,000 volumes of library books; the Congressman also petitioned the leading music companies and secured band instruments for the Home Band, which played three times a week at the veterans' bandstand; and

WHEREAS, the men who were admitted to the Mountain Branch Home were expected to work, within the confines of their physical abilities. The branch had a 250-acre farm with dairy cattle, a coal-fired power plant, a dining hall feeding 2,500 people per day, and an infirmary watching over the sick. Those refusing to work were expelled from the Home. There was a "member-guard" force to enforce the rules and regulations as well as a jail for confinement. There was no shortage of work assignments for the residents of the Home; and

WHEREAS, from 1918-19, veterans were coming home from Europe and World War I with lung-scarring from gas attacks, TB outbreaks, and a worldwide epidemic of influenza. As space had to be made to accommodate the increasing need for medical attention for our

veterans, the original residential concept changed to a medically-focused facility. The Mountain Branch Home's civil war veterans were encouraged to move into the community as large porches were built onto the barracks for the incoming wounded, in the belief that the fresh mountain air would help heal the young men of their wounds; and

WHEREAS, today, the medically-focused facility boasts an annual operating budget of \$132 million, including \$80 million in salaries. Over 1,250 employees work around-the-clock to provide excellent care to the veterans housed in the James H. Quillen VA Medical Center's 111 hospital beds, 120 nursing home beds, and 348 domiciliary beds; and

WHEREAS, as new construction continues for the tenth year on a new domiciliary, a clinical services building, and an emergency room, the Mountain Branch of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers celebrates its 100th year of service to America's veterans; and

WHEREAS, the legislative delegation representing Johnson City, which includes State Senator Rusty Crowe, State Representative David Davis, and State Representative Bob Patton, are very proud of our current Veterans Affairs Medical Center Director, Carl Joseph Gerber, M.D., Ph.D., his wife, LaVora, and their children, Stephen, Michael, Gay, and Judy. The Gerber family has brought pride to our Veterans Affairs Medical Center and our community; and

WHEREAS, steadfast in its pursuit of excellence throughout the years, the James H. Quillen Veterans Affairs Medical Center has enjoyed a sacred place in the hearts of thousands; its success is directly attributable to those persons whose vision became a reality, and to those caregivers whose hearts and hands have ministered to our veterans and their families, beyond measure for the past century; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED THIRD GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that we honor and commend Director Carl Joseph Gerber, M.D., Ph.D., and the James H. Quillen VA Medical Center staff and patients on the celebration of the centennial anniversary of the Mountain Branch of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.